

### An Introduction

As small schools become more autonomous, they create new identities and establish unique school cultures. We also believe that the school's culture is inextricably linked to classroom culture. This section of resources discusses the meaning of organizational culture and explores the challenge of building school culture. You'll find tools for assessing your existing culture, developing group norms, and generating effective intergenerational dialogue. The resources explore various approaches to the issue of organizational culture, including techniques from the business world, the connection to physical spaces, and the use of traditions.

The concept of *culture* refers to a group's shared beliefs, customs, and behavior. A school's culture includes the obvious elements of schedules, curriculum, demographics, and policies, as well as the social interactions that occur within those structures and give a school its look and feel as "friendly," "elite," "competitive," "inclusive," and so on.

Just as culture is critical to understanding the dynamics behind any thriving community, organization, or business, the daily realities and deep structure of school life hold the key to educational success. Reforms that strive for educational excellence are likely to fail unless they are meaningfully linked to the school's unique culture. For small schools newly born from a large high school, creating a unique school culture will be an important component of success. According to small schools researcher Mary Ann Raywid:

If you want to get the benefit of small, then the kids have to affiliate with the unit—the small school—in order to bring it off. Unless teachers can create their own school climate—unless the kids can see some difference when they leave their own part of the building—then they are not going to identify with it. And if they don't identify, you have lost the battle. Unless the kids bond with the teachers (and the students as well) then they aren't going to feel that they are really involved with or a part of this process and won't buy the schools values, and therefore schools won't work.<sup>1</sup>

The school profiles, beginning on page 148, reveal that school culture is variously defined by:

- ⇒ Rituals
- ⇒ Expectations
- ⇒ Relationships
- ⇒ Curricular focus
- ⇒ Extra-curricular activities
- ⇒ Decision-making processes
- ⇒ Graduation requirements

And any other aspect of "the way we do things here."

Because these aspects of culture are primarily formed through teacher-student interactions, classroom culture is an intrinsic part of school culture. The *Discipline Approaches* section further explores this connection and introduces methods for restorative practices in classroom discipline.

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<sup>1</sup> Raywid, M.A. (2001). *Viewpoints: Small by design: Resizing America's high schools*. NCREL.



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**Shaping School Culture**

Excerpts from an interview with Dr. Kent Peterson

Apple Learning Exchange

[http://ali.apple.com/ali\\_sites/ali/exhibits/1000488/](http://ali.apple.com/ali_sites/ali/exhibits/1000488/)

Dr. Kent D. Peterson is professor in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Director of the Principals Leadership Institute. He is a prolific author in the areas of school improvement, school culture building, and effective leadership. In the following excerpt, Dr. Peterson discusses with Nancy Sellers the effect that school culture—the unwritten rules, rituals and expectations—has on a school and the students.

From the website above, you can link to the “*Interview*” page and listen to the interview online or download the transcript as a PDF document. The “*Resources*” page has links to two of Dr. Peterson’s articles (*Positive or Negative?* from the Journal of Staff Development and *Is Your School’s Culture Toxic or Positive?* from Education World) as well as PDFs of chapters one and seven from *The Shaping School Culture Fieldbook*.

“Not everything that counts can be measured, and not everything that can be measured, counts.”

— Albert Einstein

In these days of accountability—numbers such as test scores, daily attendance, school rankings, grade level reading proficiencies and drop out rates measure student performance and offer a picture of a school. Yet, it is obvious that those numbers only tell part of the story of a school—and in many cases, those numbers tell a very misleading story. A school is much more than a number. Indeed, there are some things that can’t be measured like test scores, but still count a great deal in determining the value of a school to the students, faculty and the community.

A school is also a culture, and has a personality of its very own. It has, hopefully, some cherished traditions, unwritten rules, unspoken expectations, a proud heritage or past, and a sense of spirit. It may have a special song, symbolizing what is important. It may have special traditions and meanings that are uniquely its own. In other words, it has a unique personality of its own.

The notion of a school culture is not new. References to a school culture go back to the 1930’s and beyond. Colleges and universities such as West Point and Harvard evoke very positive images of tradition and culture. But we now know that tradition is important not only at Notre Dame and Harvard, but even at Wellsburg middle school in Wellsburg, West Virginia and in PS 23 in the Bronx.

**Nancy: We are just beginning to understand the importance of a positive school culture on academic achievement and even on the overall quality of the school experience. Tell us what we need to first understand about school culture.**

Peterson: School culture, as Terry Deal and I define it [in *The Shaping School Culture Fieldbook*, 2002], is kind of the underlining set of norms, values, beliefs, rituals, and traditions that make up the unwritten rules of how to think, feel and act in an organization. Every organization has a conscious, predictable part of the rules and procedures and so forth, but the school's culture is often below the stream of consciousness and is really what affects how people interact in an organization. It is the unwritten rules about interaction and problem solving and decision-making.

**Nancy: Can you tell us more about how to recognize these unwritten rules?**

Peterson: All schools have a set of unwritten rules about a variety of things. In some cases there are unwritten rules about how to interact in a faculty meeting. Some faculty meetings are very cordial, collegial, and encouraging, and those are the rules of engagement. In other schools, the rules of engagement are more like, as one teacher said it, are more like Sarajevo. She said that her faculty meetings are where people attack any new idea that's presented and are more than willing to be critical of anything that lacks of curriculum instruction or student learning.

So unwritten rules are part of the culture and they shape interactions and faculty meetings. They shape what teachers talk about in the student lounge. McDougal and Little once actually studied what teachers talk about in teacher lounges. In fact, in some teacher lounges, it's very positive, very collaborative, very supportive of serving students. But, as we know in some schools, the culture actually encourages negativity and almost a toxic approach to discussions in the teacher lounge.

But almost everything in the school can have a set of unwritten rules about how to behave. They can include decision-making. Are all the decisions made by the principal? Or, are they truly shared? What about professional development? In some cases there are unwritten rules about the importance of professional development. In the Audubon Elementary School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the culture celebrated, encouraged, and reinforced the importance of professional development for staff. People talked about it, they encouraged each other to attend workshops, and they shared ideas.

And, in some schools there is a very toxic view of professional development. It is sort of like "I haven't been to a workshop in 15 years, and I don't plan to start now." So, those unwritten rules cover almost every part of the work life of teachers, administrators, and students. As family, we have seen some of the informal culture of students and how it affects the kinds of violence we've seen in Paducah, Kentucky and at Columbine.

The culture is a very, very, powerful part of what goes on in school. I have to

say finally, that there are unwritten rules about curriculum instruction and testing. I've done some work with some high schools, where we did a school history that looked at kind of views in the 70's and 80's of these teachers. In the 70's and 80's, the culture was one of total autonomy around curriculum decisions, around instructional processes, and around testing. In the 70's and 80's it was pretty much up to the teacher to decide whatever they wanted to teach. And really that culture is starting to change now, as teachers are expected and encouraged to look into a more aligned curriculum and testing that could be used for decision making. So, the culture now maybe moving towards a more professional like culture, where student learning is the focus and is regularly celebrated.

**Nancy: What does the research say about the relationship between school culture and student achievement?**

Peterson: Well, if you look at the work that Terry Deal and I have done on school culture, but also with some of the writings on corporate cultures, there's no question that the culture of the organization is a key factor in productivity and success. Without a culture that supports and recognizes the importance of certain kinds of learning goals; changes and improvements just won't happen. Culture affects what people focus on. "What's important to pay attention to?" Culture affects motivation. Motivation affects productivity. And, finally, culture affects the willingness of staff members, students, parents, and administrators, to put time into continuous improvement and refining their craft. So, culture is key to productivity.

What we found in the research on effective schools, is that if it doesn't have a positive, collegial, professional community and strong culture, productivity is just going to flounder. I've had the opportunity—kind of a sad opportunity—to visit schools with truly toxic cultures. These are cultures where productivity is damaged by a negative approach to teaching, learning and relationships. If you don't have a positive, professional culture, you are not going to have a productive school.

**Nancy: Dr. Peterson, tell us about the positive cultures – how do we know one when we see one, for example?**

Peterson: Nancy, there's no one perfect school culture, but let me suggest some features of some positive cultures that some have found with their work with cultures. First of all, there needs to be a widely shared sense of purpose and values that is consistent and shared across staff members. Without this, you have fragmentation and often times, a conflict.

Secondly, we find that there are group norms of continuous learning and school improvement that the group reinforces the importance of staff learning and a focus on continuous improvement in the school.

The third one is kind of an interesting one, which is a sense of responsibility for a student's learning. And, I think we always assume that the staff really believes and feel responsible for student learning. But, in some schools they blame the students for not being successful. In a positive school culture, staff

really feel a sense of responsibility for the learning of all students.

Fourth, we find collaborative and collegial relationships between staff members. People share ideas, problems and solutions, They work together to build a better school.

Finally, in more positive school cultures there's a real focus on professional development, and staff reflection, and sharing of professional practice. These are places where people interact around their craft; they improve their teaching; and they do it as a shared collaborative.

In toxic cultures, a term that Terry Deal and I coined, you find almost the opposite. You find almost a sense of depression and frustration in the school. There's no shared sense of purpose. The school is fragmented. There are negative norms around improvement and learning. They really don't believe that they can improve what they do. They don't believe they can bring the school up to a higher level. In toxic cultures, they blame the victim. They believe that it's the students' fault for not learning. Somehow they are not doing it right. I don't know who coined this phrase, Nancy but you know some people believe that the parents are not sending their best kids to school, but they are. They blame the community for not having better students. In toxic cultures, also, you find little celebration of success. There are few traditions that reinforce positive and supportive aspects of the school.

In the positive cultures, in contrast, you find schools where there are traditions and ceremonies, celebrating student successes, recognizing teachers who have worked hard and brought new ideas into the classroom. There is a sense of positiveness and hopefulness. You know, you go to school with toxic culture and you can almost feel it. Staff often times get in there barely before contract times, there's no sense of energy, you often hear teachers yelling at kids, and, that kind of toxicity in a culture can be very, very damaging. Not only to student learning, but to teachers own sense of possibility and hopefulness.

And, it really is important that the teacher leaders and school principals address the negativity in toxic cultures, but at the same time, Nancy, they have to spend time working to reinforce and nurture the positive parts of the culture.

**Nancy: Can you elaborate on some of these schools that you have visited that demonstrate a negative or toxic school culture?**

Peterson: Nancy, the schools have the opportunity to reinforce the positive sides of their culture through the kinds of symbols that they have, the artifacts in their school, the slogans and mottos that they have. I've visited some schools where they don't have any of these. You walk into the school and you could barely tell that it's a school. There are no school mascots, there's no student work up in the hallways - it could be a prison, for all one could tell.

You contrast that with a school that really knows how to use symbols and



you walk into the school, for example, in Joyce Elementary School in Detroit, Michigan, which was a really struggling school 15 years ago, and over time has built itself into a really positive, powerful culture. But you walk into that school, in spite of the fact that it is in an economically depressed area, there's grass and flowers in the lawns and walkways. You walk into the school and it's clean and neat. There's a school mission hanging on a large banner right in front of you. Kind of a symbolic message of what's important.

As you walk down the hall, there are actual live plants that are taken care of by kids and staff, and banners that communicate "hopefulness" and a belief in the power of kids and teachers to work together to improve learning. Symbols are really powerful. Mottos are too. In one school, it's "We Care, We Share, and We Dare." I think it's a Pennsylvania school that came up with some engaging kinds of slogans to communicate the power of their beliefs.

One school is really kind of funny. The district had the slogan, "Onward to Excellence," nice slogan, very engaging. But what did the high school principal, Hank Todd say? He wanted to push it even farther for his school, so he said, "Past Excellence, to Greatness."

So, motto's and slogans are important if they really are the values that you have. And, if they are reinforced and celebrated. One of the things you might want to do in a school is ask the question, "What is our slogan?" And, "does that really communicate our values?"

In one of the strategies I've used in working with schools, we asked them to come up with, "What song characterizes your culture?" As a way of getting what message do you want to send? What slogan reinforces your culture? In one school it was, "*I Can't Get No Satisfaction*," which was kind of a negative message. In another school, they came up with, "*Whistle While You Work*," "*We are the Champions*," and so there are ways to get at what the core values are.

One of the things that I'd encourage school leaders to do, Nancy, is to take a walk down the hallway, imagine that they have never been to the school, that they just moved to the neighborhood. And, walk down the halls and look at what the messages are on the walls, in the classrooms, in the main office. Are these messages what the core values and mission of the school are? Do you get a sense of the purpose of the school? Is there a positive reinforcing set of information and ideas about the values and norms of the school? If walking down the halls doesn't give you a positive feeling, a good sense of what the purpose and mission of the school is, you may want to find ways to develop symbols, artifacts, and mottos, to reinforce the school, because it really is a way of communicating the culture and reinforcing a positive one.

**Nancy: So, I walk down the hall and I see some signs that are toxic and some that should be there but are not. How do I as the educational leader of the building begin to shape and change the culture?**

Peterson: Nancy, there are two parts of the principal's role as a culture shaper. First is, to continue to reinforce the positive parts of the culture: communicating the core mission of the school; being excited and celebrating the good things that are going on; building traditions and ceremonies that are strong messages about the positive culture.

But, you always have to address transforming a negative one. There are 3 core processes for shaping the culture, both positively and transforming the negative. The first is to read the culture. There are two major roles there –the historian and the anthropologist.

By being a historian for your culture, you want to find a way to understand where did the culture come from? What are the kinds of experiences that built the culture over time? What are the major events in the history of the school in the 70's, 80's and 90's that have shaped the culture? You also have to be an anthropologist. Do a little bit of anthropological digging in the school. We talked about asking the question of "What song characterizes our culture?" You can also ask your staff, "What are 5 or 6 core adjectives that describe our culture?" Then sit down as a staff and look at what the messages are there. You also have to do some anthropological digging into core values in staff meetings. What are they like? What are relationships like? What is school improvement planning like in the school? What are the cultural messages there?

In some schools they are completely bureaucratic, and don't really communicate much at all. In other schools, school improvement is really a time to address core values and try to figure out how to achieve goals in ways that are more successful. If you want to be a historian and an anthropologist for your culture, you really want to read the culture.

Second part of it is, assessing the culture. As you try to understand the culture, both historically and currently, you want to look at and maybe even list, "What are all the positive, supportive, collegiate parts of the culture that you want to enforce?" Maybe even put it up on chart paper. Then take a look at "What are the less than positive, or even toxic parts of the culture that need to be addressed?" Are relationships between staff members positive? Or, are they, you know, quite toxic? How are relations between staff members and students? And, between students and students in the school?

Again, perhaps on chart paper is actually listing those things that are negative and need to be changed. Then, take those two lists and do the third thing, which is find ways to celebrate and reinforce the positive things that are going on. If you don't, they can actually start to wither away and disappear in a culture. But then, take a look at those less than positive parts of the culture and establish some task forces or committees to really directly address the problems that you've seen. You have to read the culture, you have to assess it, then you have to both reinforce and transform the culture over time.

And, finally, I would take a close look at your rituals and traditions. Are there rituals and traditions throughout the school year that celebrate the positive parts of the school that bring people together as a community, that reinforce the core values and mission of the school? If there aren't, there ought to be several things in the fall and many things in the spring that reinforce the core mission. Without ceremony, no community can sustain itself. So Nancy, those are some techniques to think about as a school leader.

**Nancy: How can principals shape culture through their daily interactions?**

Peterson: Principals shape the culture in all of their daily interactions. You know, leaders' work is characterized by brevity, variety, and fragmentation. And, that is what school leaders work is like as well - a lot in interruptions, enormous number of interactions with people. The daily work is a great time to reinforce the culture. You can spend the school tour, or the district tour, talking with people and communicating your values. Every interaction with a staff member or a student is a chance to reinforce the culture. Every time you step into a classroom, it's a chance to not talk about the ceiling tiles that need to be replaced, but to talk about student learning, and curriculum and instruction.

What principals often times don't realize, that every interaction with someone in the school, whether it's a student, a parent, a teacher, or community member, is a chance to reinforce the core value of the school. So, 2000 interactions a day are 2000 opportunities to shape the culture.

In summary, I just want to reinforce how powerful culture is to the learning of students and the productivity of the school. We are living in a time of intense accountability, and the use of data, and a focus on building structures for school, but we can't forget the importance of school culture. If we don't have schools with the kind of heart, soul, and spirit, that our kids deserve, we are not going to have the kind of productivity that we hope to achieve either. It's critically important to be able to understand the school culture and shape it in everything that you do.

### **Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures**

Jon Saphier and Matthew King

Educational Leadership, March 1985 (Vol. 42, No. 6, p. 67-74)

This article discusses how a clear vision, embodying the school's core values and purposes, gives shape to school culture and supports improvements in instruction. The article describes twelve core norms from a teacher's perspective and explains how you can support or establish these norms at your school.

As an additional exercise, consider how you would rate your school's practice of the twelve cultural norms, on a scale of 1-5. Does your rating match that of your colleagues? What can you do to improve or establish cultural norms to affect school improvement?

School improvement emerges from the confluence of four elements: the strengthening of teachers' skills, the systematic renovation of curriculum, the improvement of the organization, and the involvement of parents and citizens in responsible school-community partnerships. Underlying all four strands, however, is a school culture that either energizes or undermines them. Essentially, the culture of the school is the foundation for school improvement, a view summarized by Purkey and Smith (1982):

We have argued that an academically effective school is distinguished by its culture: a structure, process, and climate of values and norms that channel staff and students in the direction of successful teaching and learning... The logic of the cultural model is such that it points to increasing the organizational effectiveness of a school building and is neither grade-level nor curriculum specific (p. 68).

If certain norms of school culture are strong, improvements in instruction will be significant, continuous, and widespread; if these norms are weak, improvements will be at best infrequent, random, and slow. They will then depend on the unsupported energies of hungry self-starters and be confined to individual classrooms over short periods of time. The best workshops or ideas brought in from the outside will have little effect. In short, good seeds will not grow in weak cultures.

Giving shape and direction to a school's culture should be a clear, articulated vision of what the school stands for, a vision that embodies core values and purposes. Examples of core values might be community building, problem-solving skills, or effective communication. These value commitments vary from community to community; what is important for school leaders to know is the role of values as the fuel of school improvement. If core values are the fuel, then school culture is the engine.

### The 12 Norms of School Culture

The cultural norms listed in Figure 1 can be supported where they exist and built where they do not by leaders and staff. The degree to which these norms are strong makes a huge difference in the ability of school improvement activities to have a lasting, or even any, effect. Building these norms depends equally on teachers' will and commitment since good leadership alone cannot make them strong; but without such leadership, culture cannot begin to grow or be expected to endure.

While we discuss these norms from the teacher's point of view, because teachers are culture shapers, it is important to bear in mind that there is a student culture as well. The same 12 norms apply to the culture of the school

Figure 1. The Cultural Norms That Affect School Improvement

1. Collegiality
2. Experimentation
3. High expectations
4. Trust and confidence
5. Tangible support
6. Reaching out to the knowledge base
7. Appreciation and recognition
8. Caring, celebration, and humor
9. Involvement in decision making
10. Protection of what's important
11. Traditions
12. Honest, open communication

for students, but they are a direct reflection of what adults are capable of modeling among themselves.

Wherever these norms exist, they reside in teachers' and administrators' beliefs and show up in their actions. The following are hypothetical statements that represent what teachers believe and how they behave—not idle words in philosophy documents, but real actions rooted in beliefs of most of the faculty in a school with a strong culture.

#### 1. Collegiality

*"In this school the professional staff help each other. We have similar challenges and needs and different talents and knowledge. When I was having problems with cliquishness among the girls, I brought it up at lunch and got some excellent ideas from the other teachers. I wasn't afraid to bring it up because I know people here are on my side. If someone thinks they hear a strange noise coming from my room, they'll stop to check it out. It isn't everyone for themselves and just mind your own business.*

*"I think these people are darn good at what they do. I know I can learn from them and believe I have things to offer in return. Sometimes we evaluate and develop curriculum and plan special projects together, like Esther, Lorrie, and Allen doing the one-week SCIS workshop for all of us this summer. Teaching each other sometimes requires more time to plan than 'expert-led' workshops, but it allows us to work together on a significant project. Similarly our study groups—organized around topics such as cooperative learning, thinking skills, and involving senior citizens—allow us to exchange ideas. In this school we resist the notion that teaching is our 'second most private activity.'"*

## 2. Experimentation

*“Teaching is an intellectually exciting activity. Around here we are encouraged by administrators and colleagues to experiment with new ideas and techniques because that is how teachers and schools improve. And we can drop experiments that do not work and be rewarded for having tried. We are always looking for more effective ways of teaching. Just last year we published ‘Opening Classroom Doors,’ a booklet with short descriptions of new ideas tried in classrooms. One teacher, for example, shared how she used jigsaw activities to do cooperative learning in social studies.”*

## 3. High Expectations

In this school the teachers and administrators are held accountable for high performance through regular evaluations. We are specifically expected to practice collegiality and to experiment with new ideas. We are rewarded when we do and sanctioned if we don’t. Our continued professional development is highly valued by the school community. While we often feel under pressure to excel, we thrive on being part of a dynamic organization.”

## 4. Trust and Confidence

*“Administrators and parents trust my professional judgment and commitment to improvement—no matter how effective I already am—and show confidence in my ability to carry out my professional development and to design instructional activities. We are encouraged to bring new ideas into our classes and given discretion with budgets for instructional materials.”*

## 5. Tangible Support

*“When I need help to improve my instruction, people extend themselves to help me with both time and resources. Indeed, when resources become scarce, professional development remains a priority. Around here people believe the professional knowledge and skills of teachers are so important to good schooling that developing human resources is a high and continued commitment. Despite financial constraints we still have sabbaticals, summer curriculum workshops, and funds to attend professional conferences.”*

These first five norms have complicated and dependent relationships with one another. Little (1981) has written at length about the first three norms in her studies of “good schools.” In these schools, leaders have high expectations that teachers will be collegial and experiment in their teaching. Rather than being dependent on fortuitous chemistry in a group (though it helps), collegiality is an expectation that is explicitly stated by the leader, rewarded when it happens, and sanctioned when it doesn’t. Barth (1984) goes so far as to argue that “the nature of the relationships among the adults who inhabit a school has more to do with the school’s quality and character, and with the accomplishment of its pupils, than any other factor.” The importance of leaders being explicit about what they want and pressing for it is supported by recent work on school change (Loucks, 1983). While leaders need to be direct about what they expect, excellent leaders allow people plenty of latitude in choosing how they realize it:

My interpretation of the school effectiveness literature leads me to believe that these schools are both tightly coupled and

loosely coupled, an observation noted as well by Peters and Waterman in their studies of America's best run corporations. There exists in excellent schools a strong culture and clear sense of purpose, which defines the general thrust and nature of life for their inhabitants. At the same time, a great deal of freedom is given to teachers and others as to how these essential core values are to be honored and realized. This combination of tight structure around clear and explicit themes, which represent the core of the school's culture, and of autonomy for people to pursue these themes in ways that make sense to them, may well be a key reason for their success (Sergiovanni, 1984, p. 13).

Thus, leaders might require teachers to work on expanding their repertoires of teaching skills but leave the choice of how and what up to them. Simultaneously, though, these leaders would offer tangible support—for example, one release afternoon a month—and provide a menu of options such as in-house study groups, outside speakers, tuition for attending workshops or courses, or support for individual projects.

#### **6. Reaching Out to the Knowledge Base**

*“There are generic knowledge bases about teaching skills and how students learn; about teaching methods in particular areas, about young people's cognitive and affective development; and about each of the academic disciplines. These knowledge bases are practical, accessible, and very large. Teachers and supervisors are continually reaching out to them to improve their teaching and supervision.”*

There are two features of this norm we would like to highlight. The first is its aggressively curious nature. There is always more to learn, and we can respond to that understanding with energy and reach out beyond our classes or our buildings, sharing journals, attending workshops, visiting each other and other sites. A principal could model this by inviting several teachers to visit another school with him or her. Such an activity might build collegiality by bringing together teachers who don't normally work together. Indeed, as much my happen during the ride together and over lunch as happens during the visit itself.

The second feature of this norm is the reality and usefulness of these knowledge bases. The erroneous belief that there is no knowledge base about teaching limits any vision of teacher improvement. It is also isolating because in the absence of knowledge, good teaching must be intuitive; if “goodness” is inborn and intuitive, then having problems is a sign of inadequacy or too little of the “right stuff.” This syndrome discourages talking about one's teaching, especially one's problems. Furthermore, if good teaching is intuitive and there's no knowledge base, what's the good of working on improvement?

But the knowledge base on teaching is very real and expanding all the time. It tells us that there are certain things that all teachers do, regardless of age group, grade, or subject. It tells us the situations or missions that all teachers



have to deal with in one way or another. It also tells us what our options are for dealing with each area of teaching, and that matching behaviors and techniques to specific students is the name of the game. In some cases, it even gives us guidelines for how to go about the matching.

Teachers make decisions and act to deal with numerous aspects of their instruction and relationships with students. For example, experts agree that there are dozens of ways to gain and maintain attention, several kinds of objectives (Saphier and Gower, 1982), and over 20 models of teaching (Joyce and Weil, 1980). Because there are many ways to deal with each of the myriad of teaching tasks, skillful teaching involves continually broadening one's repertoire in each area and picking from it appropriately to match particular students and curriculums. The knowledge base about teaching is the available repertoire of moves and patterns of action in any area, available for anyone to learn, to refine, and to do skillfully.

Consider another knowledge base. Each subject has, in addition to the formal knowledge of its discipline, a how-to knowledge base of teaching methods and materials. Where it is the norm to consult the knowledge bases, teachers are reaching to learn new methods and examine the latest materials and not to find the single best ones, because there are no best ones. They seek to expand their repertoires so as to expand their capacity to reach students with appropriate instruction.

This particular norm, reaching out to the knowledge bases, is one of the least understood and most neglected. It is also one of the most powerful for rejuvenating an ailing school culture. In schools where the knowledge bases are cultivated, a common language for talking about instruction emerges. This language reduces the isolation commonly experienced by teachers (Lortie, 1972).

### 7. Appreciation and Recognition

*"Good teaching is honored in this school and community. The other day I found a short note from the principal in my mailbox: 'When Todd and Charley were rough-housing in the hall you spoke to them promptly and firmly yet treated them maturely by explaining the whys of your intervention. It really makes our grown-up talk about respect mean something when teachers take responsibility for all kids the way you do.' He just observed that incident for a minute, yet took the time to give me feedback. (Somehow it had more impact in writing, too.) Things like that make me feel there is a real value placed on what I do with students. I am recognized for my efforts and achievements in the classroom and the school."*

There are many ways this message can be sent: teacher recognition as a regular feature of school committee meetings; PTA luncheons at the beginning and end of the year for faculty and staff; short notes in teachers' mailboxes from a principal who notes something praiseworthy during a walk around the building; perhaps even superior service awards written up each year in local newspapers with stipends given annually to a few teachers. Of course, underlying these efforts should be a pay scale that is at least competitive with neighboring districts.



### 8. Caring, Celebration, and Humor

*"There are quite a number of occasions when we show our caring for each other and awareness of significant events in each others' lives, as well as celebrating benchmarks in the life of the school. Estelle, for example, somehow arranges a 15-minute party with some goody for every faculty member's birthday in her building. We often have these short but satisfying little gatherings in the teacher's room before the kids come in. There is a lot of humor and laughing together in this school."*

### 9. Involvement in Decision Making

*"I am included in certain meaningful decision-making processes in this school, especially when they directly affect me or my kids. That doesn't mean I am consulted on all policies or decisions; but to tell you the truth, I don't want to be—I'd never get all of my own work done. But when I am consulted, it's not a phony gesture; my input is taken seriously. And there are mechanisms open for me to raise issues. Last spring I asked the faculty advisory council to look at how kids were treating each other in the halls. That led to a faculty brainstorming session on the topic of school climate. I don't always get people to buy into my issues, or even ask them to. But when I do, the issues are treated seriously, and I am esteemed for bringing them up even if my solutions do not carry the day."*

### 10. Protection of What's Important

*"Administrators protect my instruction and planning time by keeping meetings and paperwork to a minimum. In fact, we don't even have faculty meetings in the usual sense...certainly not just for business and announcements. Those needs get covered by memos and word-of-mouth contact with the principal. When we do meet, it is for curriculum and instruction purposes, often in small groups like the study group on learning styles I was in last spring."*

### 11. Traditions

*"There is always something special to look forward to as I scan the calendar. Be it a fair, a trip, or a science Olympiad, there are events coming up that students and teachers alike see as refreshing or challenging and a definite change of pace. Some of these traditions are rooted in ceremony, others in activity. They exist both in the curriculum as grade-level projects or activities, and as recurrent events within the life of the school."*

### 12. Honest, Open Communication

*"I take responsibility for sending my own messages. I can speak to my colleagues and administrators directly and tactfully when I have a concern or a beef without fear of losing their esteem or damaging our relationship. Around here people can disagree and discuss, confront and resolve matters in a constructive manner and still be supportive of each other. And I can listen to criticism as an opportunity for self-improvement without feeling threatened."*

Robert Hinton captures these qualities when describing changing relationships in a Chinese village during the revolution:

One had to cultivate the courage to voice sincerely held opinions regardless of the vies held by others, while at the same time showing a willingness to listen to others and to change one's own opinion when honestly convinced of error. To bow with the wind, to go along with the crowd was a n irresponsible attitude that could never lead to anything but trouble... The reverse of this, to be arrogant and unbending, was just as bad (Hinton, 1966, p. 395).

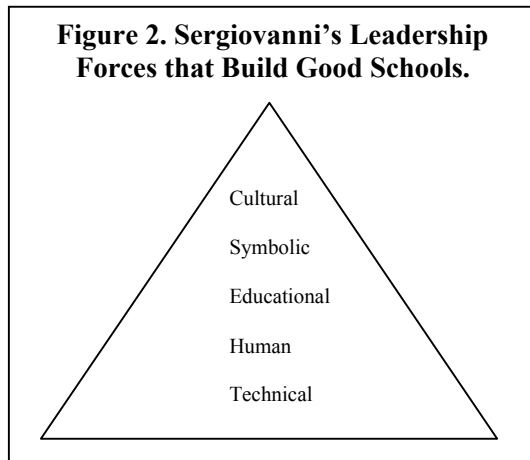
This type of communication is supported by several of the cultural norms. Difficult issues and criticism require an inner conviction that one is all right and respected by others. Appreciation and Recognition, Involvement in Decision Making, and Reaching Out to the Knowledge Bases support this kind of mutual respect.

### How to Build the Norms of School Culture

Sergiovanni (1984) describes five leadership forces where actions make a difference in building good schools (see Figure 2). Effective leaders have skills with which to apply each force.

Technical skills pertain to such managerial matters as scheduling and delegating; human skills include listening, group dynamics, and conflict resolution. Educational skills include knowledge about teaching and learning; symbolic skills include knowledge of and commitment to core institutional values and ways of articulating and representing them. And the cultural arena involves building norms such as the 12 discussed here. But if we are to understand what leaders do to build and maintain excellence in schools, the relationship among these five forces and arenas for action needs expansion.

**Figure 2. Sergiovanni's Leadership Forces that Build Good Schools.**



Leaders show their technical, human, and educational skills through activities that call them forth rather directly. A parents' night must be organized (technical and human); difficult meeting chaired (human); and conferences held after classroom observations (human and educational). We offer the proposition that leaders show their symbolic and culture-building skills

through those same activities and not in separate activities that are exclusively symbolic or cultural (with exceptions like opening-of-school speeches that are symbolic occasions). From this perspective Sergiovanni's diagram might be redrawn as shown in Figure 3.

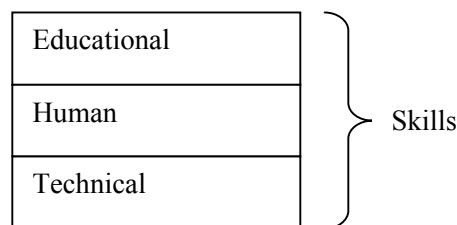
Cultures are built through the everyday business of school life. It is the way business is handled that both forms and reflects the culture. Leaders with culture-building on their minds bring an ever-present awareness of these

cultural norms to their daily interactions, decisions, and plans, thus shaping the way events take place. Because of this dynamic, culture-building occurs simultaneously and through the way school people use their educational, human, and technical skills in handling daily events or establishing regular practices.

For example, suppose there is interest in a revised curriculum planning procedure. What would a culture-builder do in a leadership position? A sure way to prevent the crisis-management of curriculum—where small numbers of parents can successfully pressure a school board, superintendent, or principal to “look into” a curriculum area such as science—is to maintain a planning process that systematically and routinely evaluates and renovates all curriculum areas. Such a system might ask parent-teacher committees to assess the existing curriculum by reviewing literature, consulting experts, and interviewing parents. Having established a curriculum’s strengths and weaknesses, the committee could write a statement of philosophy to guide the next phase—the identification of new curriculums, texts, and activities—recognizing that the review process might well validate existing programs.

With the first phase of planning complete, the parents leave the committee and turn the actual development of new curriculum over to the faculty and administration. Over the next several years, programs and activities are piloted and implemented, leading back to the evaluation phase in approximately five years. In this way awareness and commitment to culture building that is more important than any single activity or structure in the school organization. Once we are clear about what the important norms of a strong culture are, the activities and forms through which we build them are legion.

**Figure 3. Cultural and Symbolic Skills**



If we are serious about school improvement and about attracting and retaining talented people to school careers, then our highest priority should be to maintain reward structures that nurture adult growth and sustain the school as an attractive workplace. A strong culture is crucial to making schools attractive workplaces. If the norms we have outlined are strong, the school will not only be attractive, it will be energized and constantly improving.

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**Norms Put the ‘Golden Rule’ into Practice for Groups**

Joan Richardson

*Tools for Schools*, Aug.-Sept. 1999

National Staff Development Council (NSDC)

<http://www.nsd.org/members/tools/t-aug99.pdf>

Before a staff can implement the attributes of a positive school culture described in the previous article (collegiality, experimentation, and trust, to name a few) they must be able to work together and communicate effectively. This article explains why group norms are an important tool for improving group behavior and provides some ideas for creating, publicizing, enforcing, and evaluating them.

Lillian always arrives late and thinks nothing of chatting with her seatmate while someone else is trying to make a point. Arthur routinely reads a newspaper during each meeting. Barbara can't wait until each meeting ends so she can head to the parking lot to tell someone what she could have said during the meeting.

Later, most of them grumble that “these meetings are just a waste of my time. We never get anything accomplished.”

Having a set of norms—or ground rules—that a group follows encourages behaviors that will help a group do its work and discourages behaviors that interfere with a group's effectiveness.

Think of norms as “a behavior contract,” said Kathryn Blumsack, an educational consultant from Maryland who specializes in team development.

Norms are the unwritten rules for how we act and what we do. They are the rules that govern how we interact with each other, how we conduct business, how we make decisions, how we communicate, even how we dress when we get together.

“Norms are part of the culture. They exist whether or not you acknowledge them. They exist whether or not you formalize them,” Blumsack said.

Pat Roy, director of the Delaware Professional Development Center, said identifying a set of norms is an effective way to democratize a group. Writing norms helps create groups that are able to have honest discussions that enable everyone to participate and be heard, she said.

**Who needs norms?**

Any group that meets regularly or that is trying to “do business” needs to identify its existing norms or develop new norms. In school districts, that would include department groups, grade level teams, interdisciplinary teams, content area teams, school improvement teams, action teams, curriculum

committees, leadership teams, advisory committees, and special project groups.

Although a group can pause and set norms at any time, Blumsack and Roy agree that it's ideal to set norms at the beginning of a group's work together.

"If you don't set norms at the beginning, when the behaviors become ineffective you have a harder time pulling behavior back to where it should be," Roy said.

Because every group has unspoken norms for behavior, groups need to work at being explicit about what they expect from each other. "Get those assumptions out on the table," Blumsack said.

### **Creating norms**

Some groups would prefer to have a set of norms handed to them. But Roy and Blumsack both said groups will feel more ownership of the norms if they identify and write their own.

"If they don't do this, 10 minutes after you've handed them a list, they'll begin violating the norms because they aren't their norms," Roy said.

There are two distinct ways to write norms. The first is by observing and writing down the norms that already are in use.

That's how the NSDC Board of Trustees established the set of norms it has used for about eight years. The NSDC board meets for two days twice a year, each time with a lengthy agenda of material that must be addressed.

The norms [see box] grew out of a board discussion about how it operated and how it wanted to operate. Pat Roy, who was then a board member, was tapped to observe the board's implicit norms during one meeting and draft a set of norms. "Essentially, I wrote down what I saw in operation," Roy said.

Roy's first draft was edited and refined by staff and other board members. That set of initial norms has been largely unchanged over the years.

The second way is to have group members suggest ideal behaviors for groups, eventually refining those suggested behaviors into a set of norms. [See the following tool.]

Blumsack cautions that norms must fit the group. Not every group would feel comfortable with the same set of rules, which is why each group must create its own rules, she said.

For example, she recently worked with a group that was "very chatty, very extroverted." Initially, the group wanted a norm that banned side conversations. Two days into their work, the group was frustrated because Blumsack, as the facilitator, kept trying to enforce the norm against side conversations. Finally, the group agreed to modify the norm to fit its unique

personality. Their new norm was: “If you need to make a comment, do so but return quickly to the main conversation.”

### Sample Norms from the NSDC Board of Trustees and Staff

- **We will work together** as a community that values consensus rather than majority rule.
- **We will be fully “present”** at the meeting by becoming familiar with materials before we arrive and by being attentive to physical and mental engagement.
- **We will invite and welcome** the contributions of every member.
- **We will be involved** to our individual level of comfort. Each of us is responsible for airing disagreements during the meeting rather than carrying those disagreements outside the board meeting.
- **We will operate** in a collegial and friendly atmosphere.
- **We will use humor** as appropriate to help us work better together.
- **We will keep confidential** our discussions and deliberations.
- **We will be responsible** for examining all points of view before a consensus is accepted.

### Sample Norms from the Small Schools Coaches Collaborative

- **We will assume positive intent** in our work with one another.
- **We will be transparent** about the fact that we don’t always agree with one another, but do always strive for understanding.
- **We will strive for an ethos that encourages direct feedback.** We want to know how we are doing and appreciate that others do, too.
- **We will be trusting** and will work to be trustworthy.

### Publicizing the norms

Simply writing norms does not guarantee that the group will remember and respect them. Groups need to continually remind themselves about the norms they’ve identified. At a minimum, the norms should be posted in the group’s meeting room, Roy said. “Post them and celebrate them,” she said.

Blumsack recommends creating tented name cards for each group member. On the side facing out, write the group member’s name; on the side facing the member, print the group’s norms.

The NSDC board receives a list of its norms along with materials for each of its twice-a-year board meetings. Then, at the beginning of each meeting, the president reintroduces the norms to acquaint board members with them. Since new board members join each year, this also helps to acculturate newcomers with the board’s expectations.

Sometimes, the board uses activities to aid in that. During one meeting, for example, each board member was asked to illustrate one norm and the others tried to identify the norms based on those illustrations. Those illustrations were then taped to the meeting room’s walls as visual reminders to be

vigilant about the norms. Another time, board members were asked to write down as many board norms as they could recall from memory.

### **Enforcing the norms**

Perhaps the toughest part of living with norms is having the norms enforced.

“The reality is that every group will violate every norm at one time or another. So you have to talk about violations and how you’ll deal with them,” Roy said.

Blumsack agrees. “If you don’t call attention to the fact that a norm has been violated, in effect you’re creating a second set of norms. For example, a common norm is expecting everyone to be on time. If you don’t point out when someone violates that norm, then, in effect, you’re saying that it’s really not important to be on time,” Blumsack said.

After a group identifies its norms, they suggest asking how they would like to be notified that they have violated a norm. Roy recommends finding light, humorous ways to point out violations. One group she worked with kept a basket of foam rubber balls in the middle of the table. Violation of a norm meant being pelted with foam rubber balls. Other groups have used small colored cards, flags, or hankies that could be waved when a violation was noted.

Having all group members take responsibility for enforcing the norm is key, Blumsack said. Enforcing the norms should not be just the job of the group’s leader.

### **Evaluating the norms**

Finally, each group needs to periodically evaluate its adherence to the norms. A group that meets once or twice a year might evaluate each time they meet; a group that meets weekly might evaluate once a month or so.

Blumsack recommends giving each group member an opportunity to speak about what he or she has observed or take each statement and ask group members “how well did we do on this norm?”

Each member should be encouraged to identify the group’s areas of strength as well as its areas of weakness, but not to single out violators. “The more ‘up front’ you are about how the group is doing, the easier it will be to communicate about the other issues you’re dealing with,” Blumsack said.

“There’s a lot that happens between students, especially in a big school, that can take down self-esteem instead of building it up—name calling, excluding, competition, stereotyping. Students bear some of the responsibility for this, but so do teachers. It’s up to the teachers and principal to set a tone of respect and model it.”

- In Their Own Words: Student Perspectives

<http://www.whatkidscando.org>



### Developing Norms

This activity will enable a group to develop a set of operating norms or ground rules. In existing groups, anonymity will help ensure that everyone is able to express their ideas freely. That is the reason for suggesting that the facilitator provide pens or pencils and ask that everyone use the same type of writing implement.

**Supplies:** Index cards, pens/pencils, poster paper, display board, tape, tacks.

**Time:** Two hours.

#### Directions

1. Indicate to the group that effective groups generally have a set of norms that governs individual behavior, facilitates the work of the group, and enables the group to accomplish its task.
2. Provide examples of norms, such as those on page 125.
3. Recommend to the group that it establish a set of norms:
  - To ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to contribute in the meeting;
  - To increase productivity and effectiveness; and
  - To facilitate the achievement of its goals.
4. Give five index cards and the same kind of writing tool to each person in the group.
5. Ask each person to reflect on and record behaviors they consider ideal behaviors for a group. Ask them to write one idea on each of their cards. Time: 10 minutes.
6. The facilitator should shuffle all the cards together. Every effort should be made to provide anonymity for individuals, especially if the group has worked together before.
7. Turn cards face up and read each card aloud. Allow time for the group members to discuss each idea. Tape or tack each card to a display board so that all group members can see it. As each subsequent card is read aloud, ask the group to determine if it is similar to another idea that already has been expressed. Cards with similar ideas should be grouped together.
8. When all of the cards have been sorted into groups, ask the group to write the norm suggested by that group of cards. Have one group member record these new norms onto a large sheet of paper.
9. Review the proposed norms with the group. Determine whether the group can support the norms before the group adopts them.

Source: Adapted from *Tools for change workshops* by Robby Champion. Oxford, Ohio: National Staff Development Council, 1993.

## Developing Norms

WHEN ESTABLISHING NORMS, CONSIDER:	PROPOSED NORM
<b>TIME</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ When do we meet?</li> <li>▪ Will we set a beginning and ending time?</li> <li>▪ Will we start and end on time?</li> </ul>	
<b>LISTENING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How will we encourage listening?</li> <li>▪ How will we discourage interrupting?</li> </ul>	
<b>CONFIDENTIALITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Will the meetings be open?</li> <li>▪ Will what we say in the meeting be held in confidence?</li> <li>▪ What can be said after the meeting?</li> </ul>	
<b>DECISION MAKING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How will we make decisions?</li> <li>▪ Are we an advisory or a decision-making body?</li> <li>▪ Will we reach decisions by consensus?</li> <li>▪ How will we deal with conflicts?</li> </ul>	
<b>PARTICIPATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How will we encourage everyone's participation?</li> <li>▪ Will we have an attendance policy?</li> </ul>	
<b>EXPECTATIONS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What do we expect from members?</li> <li>▪ Are there requirements for participation?</li> </ul>	

Source: *Keys to successful meetings* by Stephanie Hirsh, Ann Delehant, and Sherry Sparks. Oxford, Ohio: National Staff Development Council, 1994.

### School Culture Triage

Center for Improving School Culture (CISC)

<http://www.schoolculture.net/triage.html>

The issue of school culture is of such magnitude that it requires consistent monitoring. How healthy is your school's current condition? Making a quick assessment of the school culture can assist in determining the wisest allocation of time and resources toward its long-term development or improvement.

The following survey—meant to quickly assess the state of a school's culture—was developed by the Center for Improving School Culture (CISC). CISC is dedicated to the philosophy of “people first, programs second” because “if people don't improve, programs never will.”

### What is School Culture Triage?

School Culture Triage. n.: *immediate evaluation of the current condition of school culture based on responses to a brief series of questions. It assists in determining the need for and extent of care to be provided—a protocol for care.*

Are you striving for a positive school climate supported by a spirited staff? Is your school focused on teamwork and collegiality? Are all stakeholders involved in the process? Do you struggle to attain higher levels of student achievement year after year? Unfortunately, these noble goals are impossible to achieve without a healthy school culture. How do we know if our school culture is healthy? A school culture triage—taken from medical terminology—is intended to assist schools in determining the current condition of their culture. Is there simply a need to monitor and maintain, or are we headed for intensive care?

### What is School Culture and Why is it Important?

School culture, according to Richardson (2001) “. . . is the accumulation of many individuals' values and norms. It is the consensus about what is important. It's the group's expectations, not just an individual's expectations. It's the way everyone does business.” The connection between a healthy school culture and professional development should be a major consideration since it impacts the acceptance, openness, and receptivity of a school staff.

The culture of a school has become even more important since the “accountability era” and advent of state, and possibly federal, high-stakes assessment. School communities have invoked a variety of improvement efforts as a means to correct deficiencies and promote higher levels of student achievement. Wagner and Hall-O'Phelan (1998) note that many educators and researchers alike are discovering a “missing link” in the school improvement conundrum. That “missing link” has much more to do with the

culture of the school than it does with elaborate curriculum alignment projects, scrimmage tests, and the latest buzzword reform efforts. Several authors (Levine & LeZotte, 1995;Sizer, 1988; Phillips, 1996; Peterson & Deal, 1998; Frieberg, 1998) all agree and refer to school climate and, more specifically, to school culture as an important, but often overlooked, component of school improvement.

Measuring the degree to which the following three behaviors are present in a school or school district are most helpful in assessing the school culture according to Phillips (1993). These behaviors include:

**Professional Collaboration:** Do teachers and staff meeting and working together to solve professional issues e.g. instructional, organizational or curricular issues?

**Affiliative/Collegial Relationships:** Do people enjoy working together, support one another and feel valued and included?

**Efficacy or self-determination:** Are people in this school here because they want to be? Do they work to improve their skills as true professionals or, do they simply see themselves as helpless victims of a large and uncaring bureaucracy?

Determining the quality and health of the school culture is essential for improved student achievement. Sergiovanni (2000) speaks of a “life world” or those parts of a school which create meaning, culture and significance. This is contrasted with the “systems world” or the management systems of a school such as testing. Sergiovanni maintains both worlds are needed and should support each other. “When social organizations are functioning properly the life world occupies the center position . . .” (page 6). “When the systems world dominates, school goals, purposes, values, and ideals are imposed on parents, teachers, and students rather than created by them” (page 7-8). In other words, the school culture must be the infrastructure for actualizing the goals of the school—improved student performance in a caring environment. An analysis of the school culture—whether in-depth or as a cursory preview of need—is essential for all schools as they strive to improve.

### **How Does a School Culture Triage Fit in the Overall School Improvement Plan?**

In the medical sense, triage has been used in the emergency room or near the battlefield to determine the amount and type of treatment given to casualties. With respect to school culture, triage means the usage of an initial internal questionnaire to determine the type and amount of care needed to support student achievement. Does this school need to independently and continuously diagnose school culture issues (monitor the current condition) or does the school need an in-depth analysis for the extensive development of a strong and healthy school culture (critical care)?

Responses to the following questions will assist a school to decide the level of care needed. Does the school need to extensively delve into their professional collaboration, collegial relationships, and self-determination efforts or does the school just need to monitor their relationships and efficacy?

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## SCHOOL CULTURE

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### School Culture Triage

Scoring: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Always or Almost Always

#### Professional Collaboration

1. Teachers and staff discuss instructional strategies and curriculum issues.
2. Teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule.
3. Teachers and staff are involved in the decision-making process with regard to materials and resources.
4. The student behavior code is a result of collaboration and consensus among staff.
5. The planning and organizational time allotted to teachers and staff is used to plan as collective units/teams rather than as separate individuals.

#### Affiliative Collegiality

1. Teachers and staff tell stories of celebrations that support the school's values.
2. Teachers and staff visit/talk/meet outside of the school to enjoy each other's company.
3. Our school reflects a true "sense" of community.
4. Our school schedule reflects frequent communication opportunities for teachers and staff?
5. Our school supports and appreciates the sharing of new ideas by members of our school.
6. There is a rich and robust tradition of rituals and celebrations including holidays, special events, and recognition of goal attainment.

#### Self-Determination/Efficacy

1. When something is not working in our school, the faculty and staff predict and prevent rather than react and repair.
2. School members are interdependent and value each other.
3. Members of our school community seek alternatives to problems/issues rather than repeating what we have always done.

4. Members of our school community seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others.
5. The school staff is empowered to make instructional decisions rather than waiting for supervisors to tell them what to do.
6. People work here because they enjoy and choose to be here.

### Scoring the Triage

The lowest triage score is 17 and the highest score is 85. After utilizing the triage questions in several program evaluations, our data suggests the following:

17 – 40 = Critical and immediate attention necessary. Conduct a full-scale assessment of your school’s culture and invest all available resources in repairing and healing the culture.

41 – 60 = Modifications and improvements are necessary. Begin with a more intense assessment of your school’s culture to determine which area is in most need of improvement.

60 – 75 = Monitor and maintain making positive adjustments.

76 – 85 = Amazing! We have never had a score higher than 75!

In addition to scoring each statement on a scale of 1 to 5, challenge yourself to provide supporting evidence for your score. After you and your colleagues have completed the Triage exercise, select one staff representative to compile the scores and the evidence into one document. Review the scores as a group.

- When are the answers aligned and when are they different?
- What accounts for the differences?
- What are the resources and/or obstacles to get each score toward a 5?
- Does the evidence that people provided suggest that there is a common understanding of each school culture statement?

Another instrument for facilitating the thinking, talking and action of using data as a tool for equitable school change is an article (and protocol) by Laurie Olsen, called “The Data Dialogue for Moving School Equity,” which was published in *California Perspectives*, January 1997 (Vol. 5).

You can order this publication at  
[http://www.californiatomorrow.org/publications/cts.pl?pub\\_id=12](http://www.californiatomorrow.org/publications/cts.pl?pub_id=12).

### Meaningful Student Involvement: Guide to Inclusive School Change

Adam Fletcher (2003)

<http://www.soundout.org>

Students play a crucial role in shaping school culture. But too often, strategies meant to engage students fall short of meaningful student involvement. This article provides a framework for schools to assess their level of student involvement and strategies for making it more meaningful. Not all schools will climb to the top rung on the Ladder of Student Involvement, but none can justify resting at the bottom.

Soundout.org provides numerous examples of what students are doing in their schools and has a *Meaningful Student Involvement Resource Guide* available to download.

*Imagine... The billboards across the city advertise candidates for the school board. Several are for students running for positions. As we arrive at the school, a number of students, parents, teachers, and administrators greet us. In the main hallway is the school's mission, proudly proclaiming that it was co-authored by students, and signed by the entire school community, including every student. A student-led tour of the school shows students teaching classes, administrators coaching teacher workshops on student empowerment, students conducting research on their school, and students completing evaluations of themselves and their teachers. Attending a school board meeting after school, we witness students proposing budgets and curricula and working with adult leaders to devise the district's ten-year plan. Next, we arrive at a meeting where students are partnering with community leaders to plan a neighborhood rally; we learn that they are earning credit in their civics class. That evening we present the school with the "Exemplary Student Involvement" award, knowing fully that they've earned it.*

While this story is fictitious, the examples within it are not. Across the nation there is a growing movement to enrich the roles of students throughout schools. In Annapolis, Maryland, the local school district has engaged students as full voting members of the school board for more than 25 years. In Oakland, California a group of students recently led a district-wide evaluation of their teachers, curriculum, facilities, and students. Generation YES, a nationwide technology program, infuses students teaching teachers technology as a powerful way to engage students in learning as well as promote classroom efficacy, with educators raving about this powerful learning model.

Despite mounting pressure on schools, or perhaps because of it, recent evidence indicates a growing awareness among educators that students play a crucial role in the success of school reform. A number of recent educator- and student-written narratives proclaim that it is not about "making students



happy,” pacifying unruly children, or allowing students to run the school.

These first-person accounts exclaim that when educators partner *with* students to improve learning, teaching and leadership, school change is positive and effective for everyone. However, in spite of these reports and continued proclamations of the dire necessity of actively engaging students in school change, many students still find that they are continually neglected – and sometimes actively suppressed – in many school improvement efforts.

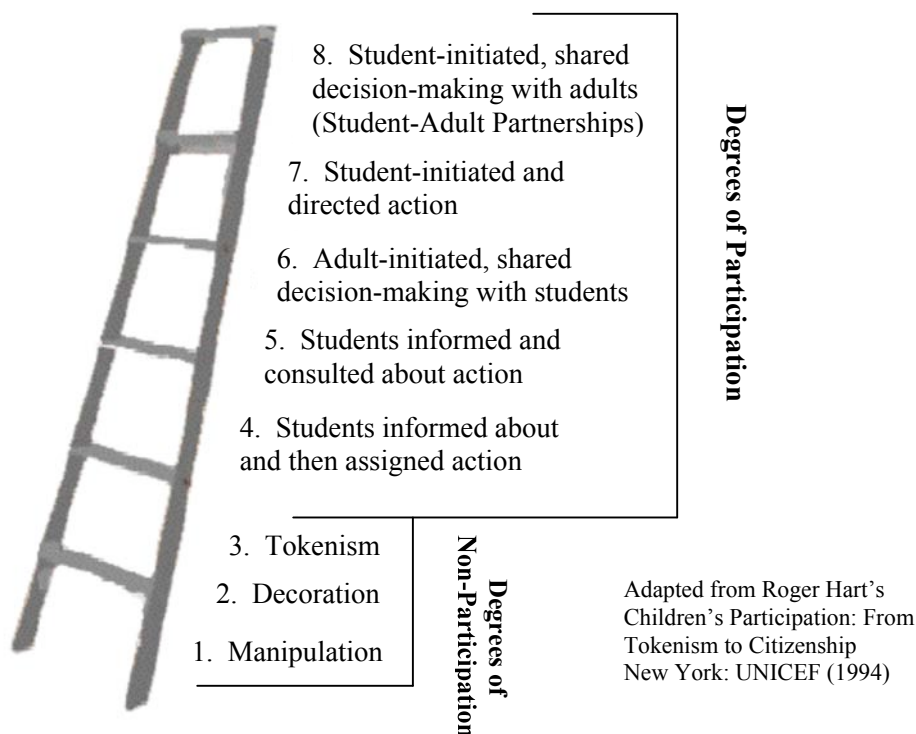
The goal of this guide is to establish a foundation for an emerging movement that promotes democracy in education by engaging students in researching, planning, teaching, evaluating, leading and advocating for schools. This guide centers on a framework called Meaningful Student Involvement, devised to improve the quality of schools through inclusive, purposeful and active student engagement.

A philosopher once wrote that each generation must struggle to define democracy anew for itself, lest it die in antiquity and irrelevancy. When implemented, Meaningful Student Involvement gives students the chance to experience, analyze, and challenge democracy from their earliest years. This guide offers the first steps in that direction.

The *Ladder of Student Involvement in School* was adapted from the work of Roger Hart, a United Nations expert on children’s participation in community planning.

### The Ladder of Student Involvement in School

by Adam Fletcher



By mapping situations and activities that involve students on the rungs of the Ladder, schools can assess their levels of Meaningful Student Involvement. The higher the rung on the Ladder, the greater the meaningfulness of student involvement. This Guide seeks to help schools reach higher rungs – that is, increase the amount and improve the quality of student participation in schools. The rungs on this Ladder don't represent a developmental process that happens through finite increments. Student involvement can go from the second rung directly to the sixth. The Ladder is meant to represent possibilities, not predictions, for growth.

*The degrees of participation include (8 being the highest):*

**8) Student-initiated, shared decisions with teachers:** Projects, classes, or activities are initiated by students, and decision-making is shared among students and adults. These projects empower students while at the same time enabling them to access and learn from the life experience and expertise of adults.

**7) Students-initiated and directed:** Students initiate and direct a project, class, or activity. Adults are involved only in a supportive role.

**6) Adult-initiated, shared decisions with students:** Projects, classes, or activities are initiated by adults, but the decision-making is shared with students involved.

**5) Consulted and informed:** Students give advice on projects, classes, or activities designed and run by adults. The students are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults.

**4) Assigned but taught:** Students are assigned a specific role, told about how, and taught why they are being involved.

*The degrees of non-participation include (1 being the lowest):*

**3) Tokenism:** Students appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate.

**2) Decoration:** Students are used to help or bolster a cause in a relatively indirect way; adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by students. Causes are determined by adults, and adults make all decisions.

**1) Manipulation:** Adults use students to support causes by pretending that those causes are inspired by students.

“When you do involve students, don't just go to the student council or the ‘top’ students. They represent just one group. Maybe the students you really need to talk to are the ones who are ditching. The main point is to talk to as many students as possible.”

- In their Own Words: Student Perspectives  
<http://www.whatkidscando.org>

**Effective Intergenerational Dialogue**

Kathryn Squires and Katy Karschney

Small Schools Coaches Collaborative

<http://www.smallschoolsproject.org>

Small schools coaches are asking adults and students to co-create better learning environments, as well as solutions to school challenges. But many schools lack the structures necessary for this to happen and adults don't always recognize the power and importance of student voice. At West Valley High School in Spokane, WA, students and coaches met regularly in focus groups to explore the redesign challenges of the school. After a yearlong effort, students, coaches and administrators agreed upon the need for an intergenerational vision team. The purpose of the vision team rests upon research suggesting that true intergenerational dialogue transforms adults and children alike. Children bring new perspectives to the table and challenge the adults' thinking; adults do the same for students.

The following article describes the elements of effective intergenerational dialogue, along with some suggestions for their application in the school setting. The accompanying questions offer some practical ways for adults to focus on those elements as they structure their conversations with students.

Many schools undertaking school reform have wisely chosen to include the voices of students as they plan for their school's future. New beliefs are emerging among educators regarding the capacity of children to engage in meaningful dialogue about their school environment. Meier (2002) suggests that children possess a natural drive to make sense of their lives, and that schools should trust children's capacity to impact their learning world. "All kids are indeed capable of generating powerful ideas; they can rise to the occasion."

However, schools have not traditionally included students in many of their major curricular and structural decisions. Hart (1992) argues that although adults "involve" children in certain school endeavors, they do not necessarily view them as true "participants." Holt (1975) claims that the observer only needs to "lean the ladder against the [school] institution and see how few rungs children are able to climb."

In addition, we cannot assume that adults and children are prepared with the skills necessary to engage in productive intergenerational dialogue. The following pages represent an attempt to list and describe the essential elements of effective intergenerational dialogue, along with some suggestions for their application in the school setting.

Current theorists suggest that *dialogue* is compelling conversation that:

1. Transforms participants,
2. Supports relationships in community,
3. Promotes divergent thinking,

4. Demands a balance of power among participants, and
5. Transforms society.

True dialogue **TRANSFORMS** participants—adults and children alike—by fostering change, growth, and new understanding. Transformation requires participants to remain in the moment, focusing on the sharing of ideas—rather than the mere pursuit of answers and solutions.

Dialogic Transformation	
<b>1. Adults are co-learners with students and are transformed in dialogue.</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Teachers suspend their “teacher” role in order to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Resist the compulsion to “rush in and fix things” as children speak</li> <li>▪ Suppress the tendency to take charge</li> <li>▪ Listen with acceptance without filtering what <i>is</i> through how it <i>should</i> be.</li> </ul> </li> <li>b. Adults and students regularly reflect on how their thinking has changed.</li> </ol>	
<b>2. Transformation hinges upon the recognition that adults and students represent multiple generations—each a different culture with its own language.</b>	
<p>Adults and children commit to recognizing and overcoming language barriers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Jargon presents a challenge. When its use is necessary, explanations and definitions should be shared in a respectful process.</li> <li>▪ Adults need to avoid the tendency to correct the grammar of their young co-participants.</li> <li>▪ Paraphrasing must be used carefully. Interestingly, paraphrasing often alienates, rather than includes participants. (It sometimes alters the intended message, and occasionally erodes the confidence of the speaker.)</li> </ul>	

**RELATIONSHIP** in dialogue means that participants reflect *together*; it is not something participants do *to* one another, but something they do *with* one another. The relational context of dialogue demands a level of empathy, so that participants know the world from the other person’s vantage point. Participants matter deeply to one another, beyond differing points of view. Therefore, dialogue requires that group members relinquish their efforts to make others understand them so that they can come to greater awareness of the issues and each other.



Dialogic Relationships
<p><b>1. Dialogue requires that participants know one another well.</b></p> <p>Because students generally feel “unknown” in schools, adults:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reach deep into their own experiences in order to “connect” meaningfully and authentically with the lives of children.</li> <li>▪ Model vulnerability and trust in the group so that young participants feel encouraged to share their thoughts, experiences, and opinions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Dialogic relationships demand trust and safety.</b></p> <p>Leaders and facilitators embed conversational practices that create safety. Those practices include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The creation of a holding environment, characterized by empathy, trust, and the regulation of stress within the group.</li> <li>▪ An emphasis on fun, laughter, and joy, which many children believe, are the glue that holds participants in relationship and makes trust possible.</li> <li>▪ A deep abiding acceptance of children’s ideas, family background, cultures, and experiences.</li> <li>▪ A commitment to confidentiality so that personal stories and opinions can be shared candidly with dialogue participants.</li> </ul>

Dialogue often implies disagreement among opinions, and requires a community to face, rather than avoid differences and conflicts.

**DIVERGENT THINKING**, therefore, is essential, and should not be suppressed for the sake of harmony among group members. Dialogue welcomes contentious, as well as collaborative discussions, and demands talking and listening in such a way that divergent perspectives foster growth and learning in all members of the group.

Divergent Thinking in Dialogue
<p><b>1. Participants must overcome fear of conflict.</b></p> <p>Conflict is intentionally structured in dialogue such that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participants are encouraged to share opposing or different points of view, and are responsible to challenge each other’s thinking</li> <li>▪ Conflict resolution does not imply win-loss solutions</li> <li>▪ Participants sometimes opt for working-draft agreements, rather than permanent decisions, in order to avoid paralysis</li> </ul>

**2. Ideas introduced in dialogue should be explored and evaluated based on their merit, not on the age or experience of the presenter.**

- a. Adults and children are careful about assumptions:
  - Adults must avoid the temptation to dismiss the ideas of children, simply because the child's age (e.g. "You'll think differently when you grow up.")
  - Likewise, children must be cautious about dismissing the ideas of adults, simply because they believe adults cannot empathize (e.g. "You're too old to get it...")
- b. Adults and children avoid the common inclination toward "right-wrong" thinking.

**A BALANCE OF POWER IN DIALOGUE** implies dialogic "equity," so that *every* participant speaks their mind in a conversational setting free from social stratification and domination. Dialogue both demands and begets individual dignity and equality. Central to dialogue is the concept of "voice," defined as "the right or ability to express an opinion," such that even participants without "formal authority" are able to impact the direction of discourse and decisions of the group.

<b>Dialogic Power Balance</b>
<p><b>1. Traditional power imbalances in schools are recognized and addressed.</b></p> <p>In order to create dialogic equity, conversational structures avoid adult-child social stratification.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ "Airtime" equity reflects a balance of power.</li> <li>▪ The frequent use of protocols helps to create dialogic equity.</li> <li>▪ Children are recognized as "resources" for ideas, wisdom, and creativity. Academic ability does not pre-determine a child's ability to dialogue intelligently.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Dialogue demands respect for the voice of each participant (Voice = the right to express thoughts, beliefs, or feelings, and the power to influence the views of others).</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Control often determines power distribution:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adults avoid the tendency to "control" the conversation by filtering, evaluating, or directing comments.</li> </ul> </li> <li>b. Children's ideas are not received with "token" approval.</li> </ul>

Dialogue gradually promotes **SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION**, with the steady unfolding of more compassionate and liberating relationships and social structures. True dialogue creates the *possibility* for collective change and improvement in communication, offering more constructive ways for living out relationships in schools, workplaces and families. Intergenerational dialogue taps the wisdom of the elders and the energy of youth in order to meet the new challenges of our increasingly diverse communities.

Societal Transformation Through Dialogue
<p><b>1. The content of dialogue addresses the problems and issues facing a community.</b></p> <p>Participants avoid the tendency to segregate adults and children in dialogue based on “issues” (e.g. “That is a topic for adults to deal with.” Or “Kids can handle that issue.”)</p>
<p><b>2. Dialogue results in more compassionate and liberating relationships and social structures.</b></p> <p>Adults and children are challenged together to confront important topics in their learning community, such as issues of social justice, the achievement gap, etc.</p>

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### Practical Questions for Intergenerational Group Conversations and Meetings

Who:

**1. Students:**

- ☐ Have we paid attention to diversity of students (gender, culture, race, age, etc.) when forming our group?
- ☐ Is the voice of the "unsuccessful student" represented in our group?
- ☐ Do the numbers in our group reflect an equal number of adults and children?

**2. Adults:**

- ☐ Is there a balance in number between administrators, teachers, and community members?
- ☐ Have we paid attention to diversity of adults (gender, culture, race, teaching experience, etc.) when forming our group?

**3. Facilitator**

- ☐ Does our facilitator understand the elements of dialogue (e.g. power balance, divergent thinking, etc.)?
- ☐ Is our facilitator skilled in interpersonal dynamics and connections with students?
- ☐ Have we created opportunities for adults and children to co-facilitate meetings?

What:

**1. Connections and Introductions:**

- ☐ Have we intentionally structured opening activities that introduce the members of our group?
- ☐ Do our opening connections and introductions develop greater community among members?
- ☐ Do they "soften" the setting with laughter, fun, or collective reflection?
- ☐ Do the connections center on intergenerational conversations?

**2. Norms:**

- ☐ Has our group developed some simple working norms together that serve to create dialogic equity?
- ☐ Do our norms include respecting all individuals, embracing equity, and sharing "air time?"

**3. Content:**

- ☐ Is our agenda realistic enough to allow substantial time for authentic discussion around issues?
- ☐ Do our issues reflect a genuine commitment to improving our learning community? (For example, will the work of the group lead to recommendations, new understanding, change, agreements, or the search for more information?)
- ☐ Do issues of equity, justice, and improved learning guide our conversations?

How

**1. Preparation**

- ☐ Does our meeting time meet the needs of most of our students and adults?
- ☐ Have we published the agenda ahead of time to prepare members for discussion?
- ☐ Does our meeting space reflect a welcoming and comfortable setting? (Freedom for movement into groups? Food? Non-obstructed view of the speaker(s)?)

**2. Dialogue process**

Language and listening can create community or alienate participants...

- ☐ Have members been instructed to share the airtime, listen constructively, and honor diverse views?
- ☐ Have we structured our conversations so that most of our discussions are in small intergenerational groups of four or less participants?
- ☐ Is a balance of dialogic power evident in our norms, conversational process, and facilitation?

**3. Reflection**

- ☐ Does the group regularly reflect about the process and content of their work?
- ☐ Does the group make use of a process observer to share reflections about the dialogic elements?
- ☐ Do we use a variety of reflection tools?



**Creating Culture with Physical Spaces**

Architects of Achievement

<http://archachieve.org>

A school's use of space and its look and feel are important components of its culture. Architects of Achievement helps schools design and renovate traditional buildings to accommodate small schools of rigor and relevance. The following set of questions will help your staff reflect on whether your school space is aligned with your school's instructional design and beliefs. You can see descriptions and pictures of schools that address these design issues on the Architects of Achievement website.

Physical spaces can encourage the development of a school's unique personality with the use of ornamentation, art, decoration, furnishings, paint and/or artifacts that convey the culture, thematic emphasis or way of doing business in the school. While businesses have used the corporate concept of branding for years, small schools are increasingly appreciating the power of graphics, color, texture and visual themes that encourage a distinctive feel and culture. Such building learning signatures are helpful only in as much as they support the true work of the school, which is the development of an ethos characterized by authentic achievement and collaboration.

Unfortunately the majority of instructional spaces in high schools today consist of lines of classrooms on long corridors with rows of desks facing forward to receive wisdom from a sage on the stage. While certainly not an exhaustive list, educators may want to consider the following questions when determining the types of spaces and furnishings necessary to support their instructional designs.

- Are there places for a variety of groupings to come together in collaborative work (e.g., conference tables, seminar rooms, breakout spaces, large gathering spaces)?
- Are there places for inquiry and project-based learning (e.g., accessible science labs, work benches, art rooms, technology and media centers, access to the outdoors)?
- Are there rich, stimulating environments that reflect students' passions (e.g., visible student work, active and "live" spaces, and decorations that reflect cultural heritage and diversity)?
- Are there places for lively learning (e.g., "war rooms" where projects can be left out in progress and group ideas can be shared in collaborative work)?
- Are there display spaces for student work (e.g., "tackable" wall surfaces, white boards, projection screens and/or gallery space for three-dimensional objects, places for student exhibitions)?

## SCHOOL CULTURE

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- Are there passive places for student reflection and quiet work (e.g., comfortable places to read, be thoughtful, have a quiet conversation, or study)?
- Are there individual student workstations (e.g., places students regularly work and/or decorate as their own)?
- Are there comfortable furnishings that encourage collaboration (e.g., round tables, couches, conversation nooks, intergenerational spaces, adults located near students and students located near adults)?
- Is flexibility built in to encourage adaptive use of the space (e.g., tables, storage units and furnishings on castors to be moved and reconfigured easily, and/or are there operable and/or movable walls)?

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### **Everyday Learners**

<http://www.everydaylearners.com> (coming soon)

When adults are able to have critical conversations around the culture of a school, they are more able to focus on the academic needs of students. Such conversations include:

- Articulating and owning the “Current Reality”
- Developing Group Norms
- Surfacing Shared Values
- Describing a Vision and Mission
- Clarifying Roles, Responsibilities and Expectations
- Defining Decision-making processes
- Identifying and Prioritizing effective Problem-solving Strategies

Through their work with schools, businesses and organizations, Kent Holloway and Michele Malarney, Ph.D. have developed and refined specific processes that move teams to higher levels of performance. These processes are specifically designed to support the academic focus areas of a school or District. Their philosophy, experience and processes are being collected on the Everyday Learners website, which will be operational in June 2004.

For more information, contact [michele@everydaylearners.com](mailto:michele@everydaylearners.com).

### Why Celebrate? It Sends a Vivid Message About What is Valued

Rick DuFour

*Journal of Staff Development*, Fall 1998 (Vol. 19, No. 4)

<http://www.nsdc.org/library/jsd/dufour194.html>

Celebration is a fun and meaningful way to recognize accomplishments and reinforce shared values. In this article, a school superintendent explains how celebrations, ceremonies, and rituals shape organizational culture and shares tips for infusing celebration into the school year.

One of the most important and effective strategies for shaping the culture of any organization is celebration. The celebrations, ceremonies, and rituals of an organization reveal a great deal about its culture – how its people link their past with their present, what behaviors are reinforced, what assumptions are at work, and what is valued.

Lee Bolman and Terry Deal (1995) describe the importance of celebration this way:

“Ritual and ceremony help us experience the unseen webs of significance that tie a community together. There may be grand ceremonies for special occasions, but organizations also need simple rituals that infuse meaning and purpose into daily routine. Without ritual and ceremony, transitions become incomplete, a clutter of comings and goings. Life becomes an endless set of Wednesdays.”

The importance of attention to celebrating individual and collective accomplishments has been cited as a major factor in influencing organizational culture (Peterson, 1988), an essential strategy for enhancing organizational effectiveness (Kouzes and Posner, 1987), and a necessary condition for creating a learning community (Thompson, 1995). It is an area that must not be overlooked in the process of shaping a school culture to support a learning community.

Why celebrate? Several important benefits accrue to the school that uses celebration to foster the culture of a learning community.

**The recipients of the recognition feel noted and appreciated.** Public recognition of individuals is likely to have a positive effect on the recipients of that recognition. The research on what motivates people has offered a consistent finding: Individuals are more likely to believe their work is significant, to feel a sense of achievement, and to be motivated to give their best efforts to tasks before them when they feel that those efforts will be noted and appreciated.

**Celebration reinforces shared values and signals what is important.** Celebrating behaviors that are consistent with a school’s values reminds participants of the importance of those values. Well-constructed recognition

provides an important opportunity to parade and reinforce the specific behaviors essential to the school's continued improvement.

**Celebration provides living examples of the values of the school in action, and encourages others to act in accordance with those values.**

People tend to assess their own performance not on the basis of some arbitrary standard, but in relationship to the performance of others. Recognizing individuals and teams provides other staff members with examples and models that motivate them to engage in similar behavior.

**Celebration fuels momentum.** Calling attention to the presence of behaviors consistent with the school's values, and highlighting the positive results produced by those behaviors, reinforces the improvement initiative.

Acknowledging, honoring, and thanking everyone who contributes to building a learning community increases the likelihood that the effort will be sustained.

Furthermore, ceremonies and stories can provide evidence of the short-term wins that are critical to sustaining change (Kotter, 1996).

**Celebration is fun.** Even the most serious commitment to school improvement should include time for play. As Senge (1994) asks, "What's the point of building (a learning) community if we can't have fun?"

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**How to incorporate celebration into a school**

<http://www.nsdsc.org/library/jsd/dufour194.html>

- Explicitly state the purpose for celebration. Public recognition of individuals and groups is contrary to traditional practice in most schools. Therefore, the rationale for incorporating celebration should be carefully explained, both at the outset of the initiative and periodically thereafter. Staff members should be reminded that celebrations represent an important strategy, both for reinforcing the importance of the vision and values they have endorsed, and for helping the school to sustain its improvement initiative.
- Make celebration everyone's responsibility. Every staff member should be asked to help identify individuals and groups whose behaviors and commitments warrant recognition. Promoting shared values is everyone's business in a professional learning community, and celebration is one of the best ways to promote values.
- Establish a clear link between public recognition and the advancement of vision and values. Recognition that is explicitly linked to efforts that advance the vision or demonstrate the values of a learning community can contribute significantly to that objective. But, if a staff perceives that recognition is presented randomly, or that each person deserves to be honored regardless of his or her contribution to the improvement effort, or that rewards are given for factors unrelated to the goal of creating a learning community, the recognition will have little impact. Therefore, any public commendation should always be accompanied by a story that specifically explains how the recipients have contributed to the collective effort to improve the school.
- Create opportunities for lots of winners. Celebration is most effective when it is structured so that all staff members feel that they have the opportunity to be publicly recognized and applauded for their individual efforts and contributions. Establishing artificial "caps," such as "We will present no more than five commendations per meeting" or "Only teachers with 10 years of experience can receive an award," limits the impact a commendation program will have on a school. Developing a learning community requires creating systems specifically designed not only to provide celebrations but also to ensure that there are lots of winners.
- An achievement or contribution need not be monumental to warrant recognition. Educators should aggressively seek out simple examples of their values at work and evidence of incremental improvement – and then celebrate their findings.

### Profiles of School Culture

The following small schools are in different stages of development. Some aspects of school culture described below are time-tested while others mark the first of many years to come. Rather than suggesting that you imitate any one of them, we hope you get ideas from all of them and begin to think about how your school uses expectations, tradition, scheduling, and physical space to reinforce the culture.

As a staff, consider these questions:

Does your small school have a palpable culture? Can you articulate a school-wide philosophy? Does your school have practices and traditions that support the culture and philosophy?

#### **Academy of the Pacific Rim** (Hyde Park, MA)

<http://pacrim.org>

This school's mission is to "empower urban students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to achieve their full intellectual and social potential by combining the best of the East—high standards, discipline, and character education, with the best of the West—a commitment to individualism, creativity, and diversity." Drawing from ancient and new traditions, the school's culture reflects high expectations and a strong sense of community.

The most important word in Japanese education is *Gambatte*. Literally translated it means, "persevere, don't give up." While Americans have gotten used to wishing people "good luck," in Japan they say "*gambatte*." This word indicates that opportunity is not due to luck or happenstance but to effort, diligence, and perseverance. The Academy believes that the very same spirit is at the heart of what has made America great. In the words of Thomas Jefferson, "I am a great believer in luck and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it." For that reason, every day at the Academy begins by publicly honoring a student who has demonstrated this *gambatte* spirit.

The Academy's school culture is manifest by daily community meetings, student uniforms, and Mandarin Chinese language classes for all students beginning in the seventh grade. Students also participate in cleaning the school. Cleaning their own classrooms creates the students' sense of pride and respect for their own environment. Students and staff clean desks, sweep floors, and take out the trash. Some students and staff participate in school-wide cleaning, by sweeping stairs, cleaning bathrooms, and picking up trash around the grounds of the school.

In addition to the progress report, a journal is sent home with each student at the end of each week outlining major events that have gone on at the school. It also contains information about student achievement and reminders to parents of upcoming events. Parents/Guardians must sign the Reply Form every week to indicate that they have read the journal and have seen their

student's progress report. The Reply Form also provides space for comments or questions for teachers and/or advisors. Families are encouraged to call or email any teachers or staff when questions or concerns arise.

**The Center School** (Seattle, WA)

<http://www.seattleschools.org/schools/thecenterschool>

Since it first opened, the Center School staff has worked hard to build a sense of school community. As one teacher explained, "If you want to build a community, you have to meet as a community." But, the first two years of community meetings were unsuccessful—teachers felt they didn't work and students didn't take them seriously. They lacked leadership and structure, but a few teachers understood their potential. With designated leadership, the school now has community meetings at regular (two-week) intervals. Whereas students used to sit on the floor of a multi-purpose room, meetings are now held in a nearby theater. Students first meet with their advisory, then come together for a performance or speaker. Past meetings have featured slam poets, candidates for local elections, and a visit to an art exhibit. Students have also begun asking to present their work, a clear sign of pride and the desire to share with the larger community.

Realizing that community meetings were not an inherently flawed strategy enabled the staff to invent a new process and vision for giving them a second chance. Some of the challenges to improving the meetings included finding time for them in the weekly schedule and making the planning process accessible to students. Still missing is a larger plan for creating a holistic school community, such as school-wide trips, activities, and venues for sharing student work.

**Todd Beamer High School** (Federal Way, WA)

<http://www.fwsd.wednet.edu/tbhs/>

This new high school opened as three small academies in September 2003. Each academy's unique culture is developing, but they are all focused on increasing personalization. Even at the building level, personalization is the goal when the building principal fights the urge to return to the familiar way of doing things. "I have to constantly push against old thinking and remember that decisions must be made at the academy level."

Each academy has a self-contained administrative support group located in its wing of the building. Teachers in each academy have a common work area with individual desks, computers, phones, and file cabinets. There is also a kitchenette, a place to eat, and meeting spaces that encourage collaboration.

Before school started, principals called students' homes to welcome them and created each student's schedule by hand. Each academy held an orientation for students and family members to explain its unique program. Teachers greeted students upon entry by forming two parallel lines and



shaking students' hands as they walked between them. Teachers took students on tours of the new school building and treated them to ice cream, which was a fun way to begin getting to know each other.

The three academies maintain as much autonomy as possible, including separate student assemblies and separate staff meetings, which provide time to explore the question, "Who are we?" Now in their third month of school, the principals are doing what they can to "reclaim the cross-overs" (students originally chose up to two electives outside their academy) because teachers have noticed the loss of community and autonomy.

There is one common cultural icon posted in every classroom in the building—*C.R.A.V.E.* This "Inquiry Method" stands for:

Connections (What causes what?)

Relevance (Who cares?)

Alternatives (How might things have been different?)

View point (Whose point of view are you seeing?)

Evidence (How do you know?)

### **Leadership High School (Denver, CO)**

<http://manual.denver.k12.co.us/>

Leadership High School opened in 2002 as one of three small schools created from Manual High School. It was originally supposed to have a "business and governmental studies" theme, but had insufficient funds to keep their business and social studies teachers. The school switched gears and decided to focus on developing students' academic and leadership skills. Each year, the staff chooses 2-3 leadership qualities for students to build. The focus on high expectations and leadership skills is a priority in everybody's work.

Early on, students were late to class and apathetic about their environment. The staff chose personal responsibility and school pride as the first qualities to build. The principal began by replacing the counters in the main office with couches in order to make it more inviting. Students and staff partnered to clean-up graffiti and wax the floors. Students heard messages about caring for the school every day, from everybody. Seeing adults clean-up made students willing to pitch in too. The ensuing pride for the school environment evolved into the school culture. The school culminated that first year with a day split between school beautification projects and a joint teacher-student field day with a BBQ lunch.

Incoming freshman attend "conduct" assemblies where they learn about what's expected of them. The school culture has matured such that an upper-classman will say something to a younger student who they see writing on the walls.

The second year's focus was on organizational skills, including having a notebook and calendar, which are qualities of a successful leader. Working on this kind of skill increases teachers' expectation of students as well as students' expectations of themselves. All students attend a first semester



“honors” assembly where students with good grades and those who’ve made dramatic improvement in their grades and/or behavior are recognized. Honor roll students also earn a ticket to a play or some other cultural activity that “they wouldn’t spend their own money for” (87 percent of the student body qualifies for free or reduced price lunch).

Because leaders’ skills extend beyond the classroom, Leadership High started a program called “Dining Out.” During one advisory period each year, students learn to set-up a formal dinner table using the principal’s family silverware and a teacher’s family china. All students then have dinner at an upscale restaurant. Similarly, “Dress Up Day” is a voluntary opportunity for students to practice wearing professional dress.

The culture of leadership also extends to parent involvement activities. The principal hosts several workshops each year with themes like, helping your student improve his/her grades; why parent involvement is important; and what you need to know about college. The principal also understands the importance of advertising and actively campaigns for the school, handing out magnets, pencils, and brochures wherever she goes. Teachers visit the middle school feeder schools to inform the teachers and counselors about Leadership High.

Leadership High faces some challenges and the principal still fights against the image of being part of one big school. “It’s hard to get away from the idea that if one small school is doing something, then they all should.” Like when a famous basketball player addressed Leadership High’s students and the district superintendent called to insist that the other small schools should be included. Many of the parents don’t yet understand the distinction between the small schools or know which one their child attends.

**The MET** (Providence, RI)  
<http://www.bigpicture.org>

This project-based school prides itself on educating “one student at a time.” Personalized education and a sense of community are top priorities. Each day begins with Pick-Me-Ups (PMUs), a time for announcements and brief performances. Combined with the longer weekly governance meetings, PMUs help create a close-knit, democratic community at the Met. Students take turns running the governance meetings in a town-meeting style. In the whole group or in committees, students and staff decide school policy, plan events, and address whole-school issues.

To achieve academic personalization, each student has a Learning Plan Team made up of the student, the teacher, the parent(s) or guardian(s), and the internship mentor. This team meets regularly to create, assess, and re-create appropriate learning experiences for the student. The Learning Plan Team’s meetings result in the student’s Learning Plan, an individualized curriculum of personal and academic activities determined by the student’s passions, needs, strengths, weaknesses, and learning style.



### **MATCH** (Boston, MA)

<http://www.matchschool.org>

Academic achievement and college access are the cultural foundation of Media and Technology Charter High School (MATCH). The school's philosophy includes clear rules, firm discipline (two minutes late earns an hour and a half of detention), and high expectations—a culture reinforced with as many as 25 calls a year to a parent. The school values are posted in every classroom: *What we do is important; We will not give up on you (even if you give up on yourself); You can do it.*

Every morning, a teacher greets students at the front door with a handshake and the same question, “What are you here to do today?” Students give answers like, “I’m going to try my hardest” and “I’m here to learn.” This ritual serves to welcome students into the school community and to tune teachers into how each student is feeling each day. There is also a SAT-level word of the day posted by the door, which students recite and use in a sentence before they head inside. Every teacher presents the daily coursework in terms of the same three categories: Do Now, Goals of the Day, and Homework.

MATCH has an extended school day and year that runs 8:30-3:00 Monday through Thursday (7:45 for breakfast) and 8:30-12:40 on Fridays. In addition, about one third of the students spend 90 minutes after school three days a week with small teacher-led tutorials or in the “silent, focused homework lab.” All of the 9th and 10th graders receive 2 four-hour blocks of personal tutoring each week, after school or on the weekends, for six months of the school year—the equivalent of 200 hours of tutoring. Finally, all 9th graders received a Friday two-hour enrichment program after school, including courses in Wellness (in partnership with a nearby medical school) and financial literacy (in partnership with Free4Life and Merrill Lynch).

### **Southridge High School** (Beaverton, OR)

<http://www.beavton.k12.or.us/southridge/>

Southridge High School opened in 1999 as four small learning communities called “neighborhoods.” Creating school culture has been a deliberate focus of the school since the planning stages, but Principal Sarah Boly said that “the slowest thing to develop has been neighborhood identity” and that a sense of identity must begin with the staff. Students help to shape the culture of the neighborhoods but the staff is the constant. “Adults stay, students come and go, but they can always come back home to their neighborhood,” says Boly.

Distinct neighborhood identities have developed because of activities and rituals defined by the personalities of the members. Students attribute the “feel” of their neighborhoods to the democratic decision-making and the autonomy they are given, while still remaining part of Southridge High School. Recently, neighborhoods have asked for more autonomy. “If every

person feels ownership over their learning communities then an identity emerges,” Boly states.

The staff at Southridge High School has worked hard to keep the vision they had for their “dream high school” at the forefront of how they work together. Boly attributes this to the ongoing nature of their work. “Staff development is an inherent part of everything we do. We expose every institutional practice we do that may impede equity. So much of our work happens spontaneously because staff has common space and common planning time.” The staff also has a Future Plannings process in the spring; a time to reflect and look toward the future, and craft proposals for further change.

Southridge High School has found a balance between neighborhoods that have separate cultures, and maintaining “threads” of core beliefs that cross all neighborhoods. For example, a neighborhood has its own discipline policies, academic focus, and activities, but all neighborhoods send representatives to committees organized to address the school’s vision (one such committee focuses solely on school culture). Southridge, as a whole, and in the neighborhoods, is really a school of character, integrity, and working with each other in more honest ways,” says Boly.

### **The Discovery School (Edmonds, WA)**

<http://www.edmonds.wednet.edu/mths/SlcPage/discovery.htm>

The Discovery School opened in September 2003 as one of five small schools created from Mountlake Terrace High School. Beginning with the student orientation, the staff has purposely integrated the “discovery” theme into everything they do. In addition to showing a sense of school pride, the activities have created a foundation of “personalization” and reinforced the concept of discovery in learning.

At the “Discovery Days” orientation, students met their teachers and each other through a “Discovery Quest.” Students matched teachers to quirky biographical facts (see following resource) and discovered other students’ likes, dislikes, and personal experiences. Instead of having the traditional curriculum night for parents, the school hosted “Discover Us,” an evening of student– and teacher–led activities that introduced parents to the faculty and their courses (see following resource). Teachers also created Discovery School t-shirts to wear that night and car decals, with the school’s unique logo.

As a new school, staff and students are creating the culture together. Teachers are planning “Discovery Days” to offer students a special day each month to explore their passions, both on and off campus, and to learn about the expertise and passions of guests from the community. Students kicked-off the school year with a visioning session to answer the questions:

What would it take for this to be a memorable year in the Discovery School?  
What are some topics you would like to discuss in Consult [advisory]?  
What traditions would you like to see established in the Discovery School?



**WELCOME TO MOUNTLAKE TERRACE HIGH SCHOOL'S  
CURRICULUM NIGHT AND  
THE DISCOVERY SCHOOL'S**

**DISCOVER US NIGHT**

**DISCOVERY ITINERARY**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>6:30–6:50</b>	<b>Theater</b>	<b>Parent Meeting</b>	<b>Welcome!</b>
<b>7:00–7:55</b>	<b>Discover Us Night Activities</b>		
7:00–7:30	Room 132	Raku Pottery	Hot art is very cool.
7:00–7:45	Room 128	Discovery Science	How does a tornado occur?
7:00–7:45	Upstairs Discovery Wing	Student Work Display	From the French Revolution to Children's Literature and more.
7:00–7:55	HUB	Clubs & Activities	Get involved @ MTHS.
7:00–7:55	Near the Theater	Student Break Dancers	Don't try this at home.
7:00–7:55	Room 127	Cognitive Tutor	Revolutionary computer math program.
7:00–7:55	Upstairs Discovery Wing	Drawing/Door Prizes	Get a ticket. Win a prize.
7:00–7:55	Upstairs Discovery Wing	Greeting Table	Pick up info and syllabi.
7:00–7:55	Upstairs Discovery Wing	Posters & Displays	What have your students discovered so far?
7:15–7:30	Room 225	American Sign Language	Do you know the sign for "Discovery School"?
7:15–7:45	LibLab (Library)	LibLab Tour	Discover our networked computers.
7:30–7:55	Room 121	Cooking Demonstration	Who will be the 2004 IronHawk chef?
7:30–7:55	Upper Discovery Wing	P.E. Games	How do P.E., health and culture interact?
<b>8:00–9:00</b>	<b>Meet the Staff and Discover Our Classes</b>		
8:00–8:10	Consult Room	Meet your Consult adviser	Check your student's schedule for rooms and instructors.
8:13–8:20	Period 1/2 Room	Meet your 1/2 teacher	
8:23–8:30	Period 3/4 Room	Meet your 3/4 teacher	
8:33–8:40	Period 5/6 Room	Meet your 5/6 teacher	
8:43–8:50	Period 7/8 Room	Meet your 7/8 teacher	
8:53–9:00	Period 9 Room	Meet your 9 teacher	

## Discovery Quest

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Gender ☐ female ☐ male

Great discoverers ask lots of questions, stay focused and complete the task. This morning, you have an opportunity to discover and share some interesting information about the staff you'll be working with next year as well as the students with whom you'll be studying. And, as you know, great discoverers are often rewarded for their efforts. So, the first FIVE students who have the Staff Discovery Quest Sheet filled out correctly and the FIVE students with the most Student Discovery Quest signatures will earn the first Discovery School prizes! Both of these Quests occur at the same time, so be ready to get your brain in gear and your rear out of the chair!

### Part One: The Staff Discovery Quest

Using the Staff Discovery Quest sheet (see below), find the staff member who matches one of the questions, and secure their signature on the line next to the question. When the staff member is signing your sheet, visit with them, find out one of their passions and write what you find out on the staff member's figure outline poster. Then move on until you've discovered all you can about the Discovery School staff! When you've got all the signatures, report to the designated staff member on the stage to see if you're one of the first five done. Keep this sheet with you for a project you'll do after registration today.

### STAFF DISCOVERY QUEST

Who...

- \_\_\_\_\_ ... made one point on his college freshman basketball team?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... has chased stag deer on horseback through the forests of France?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... has been to Cinque Terra Italy?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... won a wrestling championship?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... won a blue ribbon for a 4-H calf?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... piloted a float plan in Alaska?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... is building a kayak?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... is building a house?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... thinks he/she is from another planet?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... lived in Japan for 15 years?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... spent time in jail in Hungary?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... spent his/her honeymoon in Siberia?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... has finished a triathlon?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... has an identical twin living in Boston?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... broke up with his girlfriend of three years and was hit with her gift bag?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... has ridden the Seattle to Portland bike ride 10 times, and is training for the 11<sup>th</sup>?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... piloted a ship through the Panama Canal?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ... was a four-time All WesCo basketball player in high school?

### The Cathedral Within

Bill Shore (2001)

Random House

<http://www.randomhouse.com>

In this book, social entrepreneur Bill Shore shows that like the cathedral builders of an earlier time, visionaries share a single desire: to create something that endures. The book excerpts below provide another example of strong organizational culture, infused with symbolism and meaning. City Year is a national non-profit organization that “breaks down social barriers” and “develops new leaders for the common good” by uniting diverse 17-24 year olds for a year of full-time community service.

One of the things that makes City Year unique is an obsessive insistence on infusing everything with meaning, which has led to the development of a strong organizational culture. [Co-founder] Mike Brown recalls when their dilapidated first headquarters was burglarized, and an alarm company came to put in an alarm. “When the guy finished installing it, he asked us to come up with a five-digit code to get in, and we decided it would be 19682, which meant that in 1968 the country lost both Dr. King and Robert Kennedy. It was important to us that when we opened the place up in the morning and shut it at night we would do something that gave everything a little meaning. I guess it was almost like a little prayer. I can hardly remember my own home phone number on any given day, but I will never forget the code to the old City Year Headquarters.”

Brown argues that because City Year unites so many different young people, the need to create a new, inclusive culture is of primary importance. So all corps members wear uniforms and start each day with synchronized calisthenics, to physically demonstrate unity, spirit, and purpose. Each meeting at City Year begins with the sharing of “ripples”—stories from their work that give hope and inspiration.

City Year has not only developed rituals, it has studied its own history to extract learnings and captured those learnings with great discipline. [Co-founder] Alan Khazei summarizes the major ones this way:

- Remember that “every battle is won or lost before it is fought.” This piece of wisdom comes from Sun Tzu’s *The Art of the War*. City Year translates it to mean “For better or worse, you always get the result you planned (or

*Ripples*, one of City Year’s “founding stories,” was inspired by a quote from Robert F. Kennedy’s 1966 speech in South Africa, “Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny *ripple of hope*, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

failed to plan) for.” The three steps to winning battles before they are fought are to visualize a result, think backward, and implement forward.

- Decide what your core principles, values, and ideas are. Narrate them through everything that you do.
- Figure out what is fundamental to your vision, and do not compromise on that, no matter what the pressures are to do so. Be flexible, however, on everything else that is not essential to the vision—extremely flexible.
- Set what you believe to be achievable, realistic goals when starting out, and make sure that you meet or exceed every single one. It is essential to establish a strong track record of results and successes early on.
- Make all decisions with your ultimate vision in mind, but do not be worried if you cannot answer every question when you are just starting out. If the vision is strong and coherent, the path, to a degree, reveals itself.
- Learn from your own experience. The learning curve in entrepreneurial organizations is steep, and your own experience can often be your best teacher.

You can find out more about City Year at <http://www.cityyear.org>.

Stimulate your thinking about school culture by reading some of the following books and articles, which come recommended by school practitioners. The reviews are drawn from book jackets, publishers, and websites.

### **Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership**

Terrence E. Deal, Kent D. Peterson (November 1998)

Jossey-Bass

<http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0787943428.html>

Just as culture is critical to understanding the dynamics behind any thriving community, organization, or business, the daily realities and deep structure of school life hold the key to educational success. Reforms that strive for educational excellence are likely to fail unless they are meaningfully linked to the school's unique culture. In *Shaping School Culture*, Terrence E. Deal and Kent D. Peterson show how leaders can harness the power of school culture to build a lively, cooperative spirit and a sense of school identity.

The authors draw from over twenty years of research on school improvement as well as from their own extensive work with school leaders across the country to identify viable new strategies for effective school leadership. They describe the critical elements of culture—the purposes, traditions, norms, and values that guide and glue the community together—and show how a positive culture can make school reforms work. Deal and Peterson also explore the harmful characteristics of toxic cultures and suggest antidotes to negativity on the part of teachers, students, principals, or parents.

Using real-life cases from their own research, Deal and Peterson provide concrete, detailed illustrations of exemplary practice in different school cultures. They reveal the key symbolic roles that leaders play in school change and identify the specific skills needed to change school culture successfully. *Shaping School Culture* provides an action blueprint for school leaders committed to transforming their schools for success.





**The Shaping School Culture Fieldbook**

Kent D. Peterson, Terrence E. Deal (April 2002)

Jossey-Bass

<http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0787956805.html>

The *Shaping School Culture Fieldbook* provides a variety of sources of information, inspiration, and suggestions and includes more than forty field-tested exercises. Each chapter begins with a discussion of the features of culture and the symbolic roles of leaders and is followed by a set of examples that clearly illustrate the ideas. The book is filled with activities. Many are specifically designed as group activities with suggestions for how to organize the session, while others are meant to stimulate reflection and are often posed as questions. Most of the activities are designed to be used in a group setting and the questions provided in the chapters can become topics for dialogue or group brainstorming. This wonderful resource will help school leaders learn how to understand, assess, and transform their school culture for ongoing success.

**Building Professional Community in Schools**

Sharon Kruse, Karen Seashore Louis and Anthony Bryk

*Issues in Restructuring Schools*, Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, Issue No. 6, Spring 1994

[http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/archives/completed/cors/Issues\\_in\\_Restructuring\\_Schools/default.htm](http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/archives/completed/cors/Issues_in_Restructuring_Schools/default.htm)

This seminal article creates a framework for the essential and necessary elements of a powerful professional learning community. The authors see the school-based professional community as potentially leading to greater empowerment, personal dignity, and collective responsibility for student learning. They outline the necessary characteristics of such a community as including shared values, reflective dialogue, de-privatization of practice, a focus on student learning, and collaboration. Certain structures will be required, such as time to meet, interdependent teaching roles, communication structures, teacher empowerment, and school autonomy. The authors also argue for the need for openness, trust, respect, leadership, and access to expertise.



### **Transforming School Culture: Stories, Symbols, Values & The Leader's Role**

Stephen Stolp and Stuart Smith (October 2001)  
ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management  
University of Oregon

This book provides guidance for those wanting to shape culture to build excellence and caring. Stolp and Smith synthesize the research while offering numerous examples of schools' experiences with culture changes.

Chapters include:

- The importance of school culture
- Identifying and measuring culture
- Transforming school culture through systems
- Vision and leadership

Originally published in 1995.

### **School Climate: Measuring, Improving and Sustaining Healthy Learning Environments**

Freiberg, H. J. (Ed.). (1999)  
Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press.  
[http://cmcd.coe.uh.edu/bk\\_schclimate.cfm](http://cmcd.coe.uh.edu/bk_schclimate.cfm)

*School Climate* is designed to meet the needs of school and district administrators, teachers, school board and community members who want answers to the questions: How Are We Doing? How Healthy Is Our Learning Environment? Authors from four nations are represented in this book, including Australia, Israel, The Netherlands and the United States. This book provides 18 climate instruments and approaches to measure climate from multiple perspectives including, student, teacher, parent, community and administrator perspectives.



### **Developing Democratic Character in the Young [E-Book]**

Roger Soder (Editor), John I. Goodlad (Editor), Timothy J.  
McMannon (Editor) (February, 2002)  
<http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0787960004.html>

How are students going to function effectively in a democratic society? This collection of original essays outlines the critical role of our schools in helping create the conditions necessary for a democracy—and helping create

in students the characteristics or dispositions critical to maintaining a democracy.

**Measuring School Climate:****Let Me Count the Ways**

H. Jerome Freiberg

ASCD

*Educational Leadership*, September 1998

(Vol. 56, No. 1)

[http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed\\_lead/199809/toc.html](http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/199809/toc.html)

School climate—a complex interaction of many factors—has a major effect on teaching and learning, and should play a significant role in any school reform effort, according to the author. He urges educators to seek the student perspective in measuring school climate, and describes three specific measuring instruments—student concerns surveys, entrance and exit interviews of incoming and graduating high school students, and an "ambient noise checklist"—that schools have used successfully. These instruments helped them make simple but meaningful changes that led to healthier educational environments.

**Professional Communities and the Work of High School Teaching**

McLaughlin, Milbrey W. and Joan E. Talbert

University of Chicago Press

<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/hfs.cgi/00/14326.ctl>

American high schools have never been under more pressure to reform: student populations are more diverse than ever, resources are limited, and teachers are expected to teach to high standards for all students. While many reformers look for change at the state or district level, the authors here argue that the most local contexts—schools, departments, and communities—matter the most to how well teachers perform in the classroom and how satisfied they are professionally. Their findings—based on one of the most extensive research projects ever done on secondary teaching—show that departmental cultures play a crucial role in classroom settings and expectations. In the same school, for example, social studies teachers described their students as "apathetic and unwilling to work," while English teachers described the same students as "bright, interesting, and energetic." With wide-ranging implications for educational practice and policy, this unprecedented look into teacher communities is essential reading for educators, administrators, and all those concerned with U. S. High Schools.



“*Professional Communities and the Work of High School Teaching* [is] the capstone book after more than a decade of research . . . . The authors build a convincing case for the centrality of professional culture in teachers' work and its potential role for reforming high schools.”

—Susan Moore Johnson, *Journal of Educational Change*

